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"banned islamic ngos

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The Indian Ocean Newsletter

September 12, 1998

SECTION: POLITICS & POWER; KENYA; N. 824**LENGTH:** 337 words**HEADLINE:** Banned Islamic NGOs**BODY:**

When Kenyan head of state Daniel arap Moi two weeks ago threatened to cancel the authorization of certain NGOs, he seemed to be targeting local NGOs close to the opposition, such as Citizens Coalition for Constitution Change, Clarion, Kenya Human Rights Commission, International Commission of Jurists' local branch, or Kituo cha Sheria (a legal aid centre) among others, which have been highly critical of the political establishment.

But the ban pronounced "for security reasons" on September 8 hit NGOs associated with fundamental Islamism inside and outside of Kenya following investigations into last month's bomb attacks on American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The NGOs are Al Haramain Foundation, Help Africa People, Ibrahim bin Abdul Azziz al Ibrahim Foundation, International Islamic Relief Organization, and Mercy Relief International Agency.

Kenyan CID officers and US FBI agents searched the Nairobi offices of Mercy Relief International (which is suspected of having played an essential role in forwarding basic bomb-making components) after the attacks. Several of the terrorist suspects are believed to have entered Kenya as salaried employees or officials of fundamentalist NGOs. Last year, the Kenyan government had arrested several fundamentalists working for the Al Haramain Foundation on charges of inciting trouble between Christian and Muslim believers in Kenya's North-East Province (a region inhabited by mostly Somali Muslims) by pushing local inhabitants to boycott relief from non-Muslim NGOs. Churches in Wajir District were fired recently, allegedly by radical Muslim elements, and the Kenyan authorities again suspected the Al Haramain Foundation.

I.O.N. – Muslims make up some 25 percent of Kenya's population and the government ban on Muslim NGOs has sparked anxiety and protests. The very conservative and pro-government Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims went as far as accusing, in a statement, the regime of "demonizing" Islam by blaming it for the attacks.

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